a minister, my mother was at home raising us before they divorced, and I went to college. And you know what?"

"What?"

"I'm a faggot."

"No you ain't!"

"Yes I am. In fact, I'm becoming a well-known faggot."

"I don't believe you."

"Why not?"

"Because you ain't switching and stuff."

"Yeah, all you think being gay is about is men switching—but you're wrong. I'm a faggot because I love *me* enough to be who I am. If your son becomes a faggot it won't be because of the way you or his mother raise him. It won't be because of television, movies, books, and education. It will be because he learns to trust the natural expression of his sexuality without fear or shame. If he learns anything about courage from you or his mother, then he'll grow up to be himself. You can't blame being straight or gay on a woman or education. The education that's needed should be for the purpose of bringing us all out of sexual ignorance. Our diverse sexuality is determined by the will of nature, and nature *is* the will of God."

He sat there for a moment staring at me, sipping his beer. He lit another cigarette. I realized then that he could beat me to a pulp if he chose to impose his bigger size on me, but I wasn't afraid for what I had said and revealed. On too many occasions I have sat silently as men like him mouthed off about gays and women and I said nothing because I was afraid. But not today. Not this afternoon. The longer I sit silently in my own community, my own home, and say nothing, I condone the ignorance and its by-products of violence and discrimination. I prolong my existence in a realm of invisibility and complicity. I prolong our mutual suffering by saying nothing.

In this tense interlude a bus and trolley approached. I was angry with having to encounter him on such a glorious

spring day, but this is the kind of work social change requires. I consoled myself believing this.

When he rose I immediately rose too—a defensive strategy, a precaution.

"It's been good talking to you, brother. I'll think about what you've said." He extended his hand to me just as the bus and the trolley neared. I looked at his hand, known and unknown to me, offered tenuously, waiting to clasp my hand.

"Yeah, it was cool talking to you, too," I returned, as I hesitantly shook his hand. He swaggered to the bus and boarded with his beer hidden under the jacket he carried. I walked into the street to meet the trolley in an afternoon light devoid of shame.